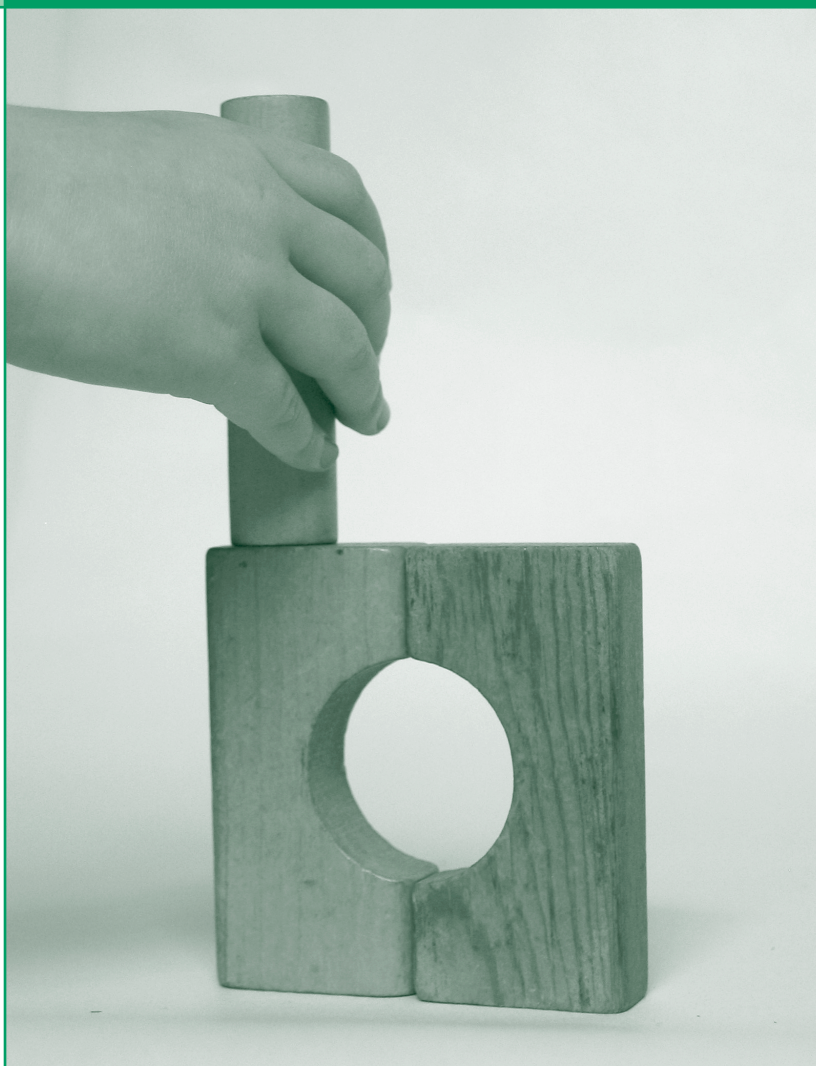
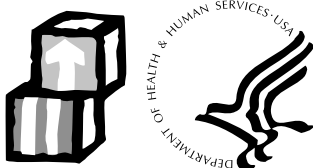


Building Blocks for Father Involvement

Building Block 3: Building a Foundation to Work with Fathers

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

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Building Block 3 is largely about assessing effectiveness in involving fathers and identifying what changes might need to be made to ensure that the program is as father-friendly as possible.

Overview

Building Block 1 provided a fuller understanding of and appreciation for how fathers contribute uniquely to the well-being and healthy development of their children. *Building Block 2* provided a framework for making an initial assessment of the Head Start program, staff, and parents relative to father involvement. *Building Blocks 1* and *2* lay the groundwork for *Building Block 3*: building a solid foundation for father involvement.

Building Block 3 is largely about assessing program effectiveness in involving fathers and identifying what changes might need to be made to ensure that the program is as father-friendly as possible. This *Building Block* will raise staff awareness of barriers that might exist and offer guidance for developing plans to overcome them.



Six Stages of Becoming a Father-Friendly Program

Stage 1

Understanding and Appreciating Fathers' Vital Contributions to Healthy Child Development

Understand how father love is of a different—but equal—quality with mother love.

Understand how fathers contribute uniquely to healthy child development.

Understand how fatherlessness harms children in many important ways.

Recognize that father involvement is more than the latest trend. It is essential to healthy child development.

Conduct full staff training on how fathers positively influence child development.

Over the past four decades, research has shown consistently the essential role that healthy father involvement plays in fostering children's growth into healthy, happy, well-educated, well-adjusted people. (See *Building Block 1*.)

Stage 2

Creating an Environment Where Fathers Feel Welcomed and Valued

Conduct an audit on the father-friendliness of the program.

Provide staff training on encouraging, seeking, and sustaining father involvement.

Learn what makes fathers more likely to participate (see *Building Block 2*) and seek out those fathers first.

Expect fathers to be involved.

Invite fathers by name and in their primary language.

Find out what men in the community want and need.

Create a special place for men.



Photo by C. Dyer, Higher Horizons HS; D. Metzger, Higher Horizons HS

What magazines do you have around your center? Be sure to keep *Sports Illustrated* and other popular men's magazines in your lobby.

Stage 3

Deciding What to Do

- Determine the areas in which you will promote the involvement of fathers with children, such as literacy development, character development, health development, and others.
- Make decisions about policy, programs, and procedures.
- Hire the proper staff.
- Identify volunteers.
- Develop a network of community resources and partners.

Stage 4

Recruiting Fathers

- Involve everybody in the program as a recruiter.
- Help mothers understand the benefit of father involvement and enlist them in the work of recruiting.
- Involve local communities of faith in the recruiting process.
- Recognize and “grab” first the dads most likely to become involved.
- Use your “first-involved” or “program-pioneer” fathers as recruiters for other community fathers.
- If a biological dad is not on the scene in the child's life, find a significant male in the family who is.
- Put creative thought into how to reach the hard-to-reach father.
- Recruit fathers from every cultural group represented by the children in the center.

Stage 5

Operating the Program

- Develop engaging, fun, “for men only” events.
- Develop interesting father/child activities.
- Continually study other programs for creative ideas for involving fathers with children.
- Develop special recognition and family events.
- Develop rich and creative parenting and child development skills activities.
- Incorporate fathers in reading/book appreciation and male character development.
- Help fathers understand how they are making a difference in the lives of their children.

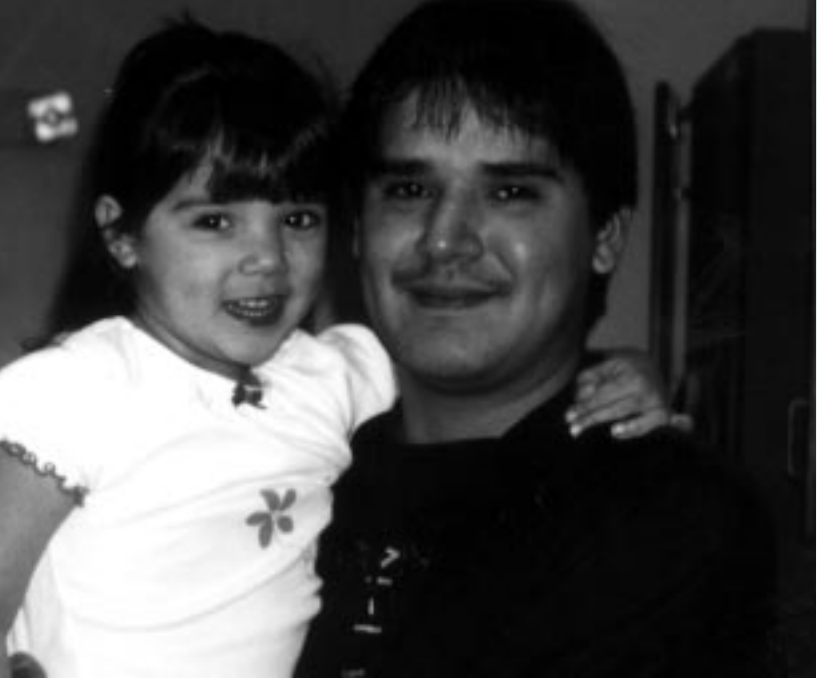


Photo by M. Barty, LCO Ojibwe School HS

Use your “first-involved” or “program-pioneer” fathers as recruiters for other community fathers. If a biological dad is not on the scene in the child’s life, find a significant male in the family who is.

Stage 6

Sustaining the Program

- Seek to expand and promote positive growth within the community.
- Do not be discouraged by slow growth—steady wins the race.
- Determine what is working and what is not.
- Increase what is working and tweak or change what is not.
- Foster and develop leadership.
- Expand the father involvement vision.
- Include program fathers as leadership.
- Grow and maintain community networks.

Adapted from materials developed by the Las Cruces, New Mexico, Public Schools Head Start Program



Photo by T. D. Summers, Child-Adult Resource Services

All things being equal, fewer nonresidential fathers are going to be involved in the program than residential fathers. However, mature programs do make a concerted effort to reach out creatively to nonresidential fathers.

What Makes a Fatherhood Program Successful?

There are a number of qualities that are common to successful Father Involvement Head Start programs. *The Summary Report on Father Involvement in Early Head Start Programs* (November 17, 2001) identifies three stages in the development of father involvement programs: early stage, mid-stage, and mature. The report goes on to identify a number of ways in which mature father involvement programs differed from early-stage and mid-stage programs. Characteristics of those programs that have successfully reached the level of “maturity”:

1) Mature programs have a *wider range* of purposes for their father involvement programs.

These programs emphasize the role of fathers as parents more often, but they also stand out by offering programs that help fathers develop as persons. Mature programs help fathers become more involved in the lives of their children, but they also offer education, plus relationship and employment skills development.

They seek to raise the self-esteem of the father, helping him understand how vital his participation is and giving him the knowledge and confidence he needs to be involved in healthy ways. Mature programs also help fathers learn positive character development with the ideal of internalizing and then teaching it to his child. They also help the father both set and realize parenting and life goals.

2) Mature programs hire a *father involvement coordinator*.

Nearly all mature, successful programs have named one or two people to be responsible for the leadership, vision, and day-to-day management of the father involvement effort. Generally, a man fills this position, and his time in the program is dedicated exclusively to father involvement or is combined with a few smaller jobs.

3) Mature programs *provide training* for the father involvement coordinator, as well as all father involvement staff.

This training includes information about the unique and vital contributions fathers make to healthy child development, factors that keep fathers from being involved, and ways to overcome barriers. Staff is also trained in understanding how to get fathers involved, the most beneficial activities to involve them in, and how to keep them involved.



4) Mature programs do a good job of involving *residential fathers*.

Dads living in the same home with their child are much easier to contact and involve in program activities. They are also more likely to be involved in the life and development of their child. These fathers should be targeted for involvement in ways that make it easier for them to participate.

5) Mature programs work with *nonresidential fathers*.

All things being equal, fewer nonresidential fathers are going to be involved in the program than residential fathers. However, mature programs do make a concerted effort to reach out creatively to nonresidential fathers. They seek to make contact with these fathers by mail or by phone to include them in program activities. Mature programs maintain a mailing list of their nonresidential fathers, conduct home visits to these dads, and hold special group meetings for nonresidential fathers that address issues that are unique to them.

6) Mature programs *create a father-friendly atmosphere*, both physically and relationally.

The Head Start center is a place where fathers feel welcome, both in its physical environment and in the relationships they encounter there. Sensitivity to fathers' work schedules is shown (such as organizing activities for evenings and Saturdays), and serving hearty meals at meetings can boost attendance.

7) Many mature programs reach out to *incarcerated fathers*.

Many mature programs take strong steps to include incarcerated fathers in their programs. They do this by mailing fathers progress reports on their children, and giving the father materials needed to write back and praise the child for his/her progress. Some programs have provided incarcerated fathers with tape recorders and good books to read on tape. Fathers can send a tape to their children along with the book, making it possible for the children to listen to their father "read" that book to them whenever they wish. A child can do the same for his/her father by drawing pictures or making up a story that corresponds to pictures in a book. It is a wonderful way to help father and child bridge the physical separation and connect in a meaningful way. Other programs make home visits in prison when possible.



Photo by B. Blanken, Rosemount Center HS; D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS

There are many factors that make it difficult to involve the father in the life of his child. Mature programs have learned to overcome such barriers creatively and successfully.

8) Mature programs recruit fathers in diverse ways.

Mature programs start by enlisting mothers in the recruitment process. However, they also draw on a male network to recruit fathers. This network consists of male staffers, fathers who have been involved in the program before, currently involved men, and men from the community (factories, industry, religious communities, sports, etc.).

9) Mature programs involve fathers *despite difficult situations*.

There are many factors that make it difficult to involve the father in the life of his child. These might include the fact that the mother or her family does not want dad involved. Mother and father may be in conflict, or there might be issues of domestic violence or substance abuse. Perhaps the father has fallen behind in child support payments.

Mature programs have learned to overcome such barriers creatively and successfully by working with the entire family and helping both mother and father appreciate the important role the father plays in his children's lives.

10) Mature programs face challenges in involving fathers, as do all Early Head Start programs, but *they report different barriers*.

Immature programs are most likely to report that programmatic problems, such as lack of male staff or insufficient training, keep them from being effective. Mature programs report problems most often related to the families, such as nonresidential fathers or the lack of a relationship between mother and father.

11) Mature programs work closely with *other community agencies*.

Mature programs are more likely to have good working relationships with community agencies such as child support enforcement and job skills development agencies, as well as access to resources that can help with issues of domestic violence and substance abuse. These programs understand that they cannot do this work themselves, and that they need the help of the larger community.

Any successful program needs a vision of where it's going, a plan and procedures for getting there, and the financial and human resources to succeed.

Photo by D. Mentzer, Higher Horizons HS



12) Mature programs can identify their key successes.

The following were commonly reported as success-leverage points that helped the program move from feeling its way through the dark to really seeing clear success in important areas:

- Creating a father needs assessment
- Providing training for all staff working with men and for father involvement coordinators
- Recruiting fathers who have completed a program to work as mentors, recruiters, and group facilitators
- Creating a program image that makes it clear that Head Start is designed for fathers as well as mothers and children

In contrast, some of the **most common** contributions to a lack of success were:

- Not building rapport and trust with fathers
- Not convincing fathers the program will work for them or that they can make a difference
- Not dealing with and helping head off the “vicious cycle” issues of young fathers who grew up in fatherless families
- Not teaching younger males about responsibility
- Not showing fathers that consistency and time are the keys to successful parenting
- Not paying attention to recruitment
- Not sharing and highlighting the positive experiences of fathers in the program with those in and outside of the program
- Not teaching dads (and moms) that there are no perfect families, thereby giving them permission to mess up and start over again...time and time again



Photo by D. Mentzer, Higher Horizons HS

Fathers are more likely to be involved in the program if they are personally invited and encouraged to participate.

Assessing Father-Friendliness

To attract fathers to Head Start, one needs to ask how friendly and inviting the program is to fathers in the community. Is it a place where they feel welcomed and appreciated? Do fathers feel like they make a difference by coming and participating?

The following are useful questions to ask in assessing father friendliness:

Does every staff member who comes in contact with fathers have an understanding and appreciation for the important role fathers play in child development? Do they see fathers as an asset to the program?

A primary step toward father friendliness is understanding and appreciating fathers in the lives of children.

Do fathers see the program as a place that readily welcomes them and offers them something valuable and significant?

Fathers are more likely to be involved in the program if they are personally invited and encouraged to participate. Fathers are likely to remain involved if they feel it is worth their own time and that of their children.

Is the fatherhood coordinator a man? Do you have men on staff who are visible and accessible to fathers?

Fathers may relate and respond more readily to the encouragement of another man.

Are there policies, procedures, and a budget in place for the fatherhood program?

Any successful program needs a vision of where it's going, a plan and procedures for getting there, and the financial and human resources to succeed.

Is the physical environment inviting to fathers?

Many fathers may have had a bad experience in school and may not be comfortable in an educational setting. Be sure your program offers an environment that makes men feel comfortable and does not seem designed solely for women and children.



Photo by B. Beavers, Dane County Parent Council

Fathers are likely to remain involved if they feel it is worth their own time and that of their children.

When a mother does not want the father involved, does your program assess the situation and, if appropriate, try to resolve the conflict, gain her support, and bring in the father in a healthy, productive manner?

Programs often have to work creatively and diplomatically to smooth the family bumps that might keep a father from becoming involved.

Is the program actively promoting its father involvement work in the community, letting all fathers know that the program is a source of help in connecting them with their children?

Fathers need to know about the program, what it has to offer, and how it can help to meet their needs.

A good, growing program can answer “yes” to most of these questions. Each affirmation contributes to a good, solid foundation for working with fathers and their children.

An immediate funding source is the current parent involvement budget, which should be devoted to serving and involving fathers as well as mothers.

Photo by B. Blanken, Rosemount Center HS



Show Me the Money! Identifying Funding Sources

When programs begin thinking about a father involvement program, one of the first questions that arises is: “How are we going to pay for this?”

Start by looking at the current parent involvement budget. These funds should be devoted to serving and involving fathers as well as mothers. Early in the program’s growth, there are advantages to relying on existing funds rather than counting on or searching for new funds because of the security and consistency.

To offer a wider range of services, you may ultimately want to seek outside funding. Possible funders include national, local, and community foundations, as well as local, State, and Federal governments. Possible funding sources available through State and Federal governments include:

- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Maintenance-of-Effort (MOE) funds
- State matching grants
- Welfare-to-Work (WtW) grant funds
- Child Support Enforcement (CSE) funds
- Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds
- Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds

Among these, TANF and State funds are the most flexible.

Keep an eye out for requests for proposals (RFPs), even those that may not specifically focus on the topic of fatherhood. Often the fatherhood implications of another topic, such as child abuse, school readiness, or crime prevention, can be emphasized.



Photo courtesy of HSNRC

Keep an eye out for requests for proposals (RFPs), even those that may not specifically be on the topic of fatherhood. Often you can stress the fatherhood implications of another topic.

Community partners can also play a role in securing grant funding. Many foundations look favorably on creative community collaborations.

In addition, consider asking local businesses for contributions of goods that can serve as participation incentives for fathers. These might include tickets to community events, clothing, toys, books, or other educational materials. You can seek contributions that can be used in the work of the program also.

There are many creative ways to successfully fund fatherhood involvement programs. Opportunities are growing because more government agencies and foundations realize the wisdom and cost-effectiveness of involving fathers in the lives of their children.

Fatherhood coordinators must have a passion for getting fathers involved in the lives of their children.

Photo by D. Mentzer, Rosemount Center HS



Who Will Do the Work? Identify and Train Key Staff

A successful father involvement program requires a dedicated staff. They must have an understanding of the importance of fatherhood and be committed to doing what is necessary to succeed. A vital step is to hire a full-time fatherhood coordinator. As noted earlier, this position is ideally best filled by a man who will be a peer to the fathers in the community. Community networks might also be helpful in identifying strong candidates.

What are the qualifications of a successful fatherhood coordinator?

Your fatherhood coordinator must have:

- A commitment to children and families;
- An understanding of the important role fathers play in healthy child development;
- A passion for getting fathers involved in the lives of their children;
- Empathy, respect, and high expectations for all fathers, regardless of their backgrounds;
- The ability (and desire) to build bridges between women and men, between mothers and fathers;
- The desire and ability to develop rapport and sturdy relationships with men from diverse and unfamiliar backgrounds;
- Knowledge of and connections to the community; and
- A willingness to work above and beyond the call of duty – this is not a 9-to-5 job.

The characteristics listed above are essential. If possible, someone with counseling and group leadership skills would be a plus.

Admittedly, it is a difficult task to find an all-in-one person. Someone with many of these skills but not all could be provided training, coaching, and support to enhance their skills. Even if the fatherhood coordinator has all these skills, it is recommended that training and coaching be a part of their professional development. This is a challenging job, and support is essential. It is important that the program's key administrator participate in this

Make sure your fatherhood program has a good inspiring vision, quality leadership and an educated, motivated staff.

Photo by C. Dyer, Higher Horizons HS



training with the fatherhood coordinator, so that components of the program grow in concert with one another. A number of national organizations offer training in father involvement.

If the budget permits, build a team of fatherhood professionals to support program efforts.

A female coordinator can successfully manage a fatherhood program, but, typically, with much greater success if men, as volunteers and community partners, are actively involved, too. A female coordinator must be a strong supporter of father involvement, and she must have the backing and respect of men within and outside the program.

Building Staff Commitment

The action plan for a father involvement program, developed through the Father-Friendliness Environmental Audit, probably requires that staff be trained and that their support for the program be secured. This typically involves several steps.

1) Start by gaining the support of program leaders, including the governing board and Policy Council. Arrange presentations to educate and inspire them about how important father involvement is to achieving positive outcomes for Head Start children.

The U.S. Department of Education has created a useful PowerPoint presentation, *Fathers Matter! Involving Fathers in Children's Learning*, for educators and other childhood professionals to use in educating groups about the important role fathers play in education. An outline of this resource, entitled "A Kit for Educators and Other Professionals Talking Points for Overheads," is found in the Appendix of *Building Block 3*.

2) Create a plan for training the staff. A half-day or full-day training workshop on father involvement could be offered for starters. Head Start Regional technical assistance (T&TA) providers can help in designing and delivering such a workshop.

3) Don't fall into the trap of thinking that one workshop is enough. Develop a coherent, long-term strategic training plan that reinforces the message through presentations and activities at staff meetings and other



If the budget permits, build a team of fatherhood professionals to support program efforts.

gatherings. Encourage staff to attend relevant workshops at Head Start conferences. If staff turnover is significant, be sure to offer ongoing workshops for new staff.

4) Make sure the fatherhood program has a good inspiring vision, quality leadership, and an educated, motivated staff. With these assets, there is no limit to the good the program can do in the lives of children, their fathers, mothers, and extended family.



Photo by K. Ford, Neighborhood House HS

The support and buy-in of many community leaders and organizations are needed to succeed.

Identify and Involve Community Partners

To paraphrase an old saying: *it takes a village* to build a successful fatherhood program. The support and buy-in of many community leaders and organizations are needed to succeed.

Here are some ideas for adopting potential community partners:

Faith Community: Recent research indicates that religiously affiliated fathers are substantially more likely to be involved in the lives of their children than fathers who are not.² These communities can help with basic educational issues like developing reading and language skills, as well as helping fathers and mothers develop relationship skills.

Colleges and Universities: Early childhood education students need to do practicums. Get these students involved in your program. Also, fraternities like Alpha Phi Alpha can make substantial contributions by having men spend time mentoring Head Start children. Partnerships can also be established to create education opportunities for fathers, such as GED, learning English, or developing job skills.

Local Businesses and Industry: Local businesses and industry can become partners, offering employees creative opportunities for volunteering in community service. These can also be very good sources for obtaining materials through donations to meet program needs. Think of potential business partners that might be of special interest to men, such as car dealerships, sports shops, and radio stations, etc.

Child Support Enforcement: Through such a partnership, fathers can stay in good graces with their child support payments and at the same time feel like they are more than “a paycheck” in their child’s life. The Head Start Bureau and the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) are partners in the Administration for Children and Families. Make contact with the fatherhood person in the OCSE Regional Office to help connect with someone in the local child support enforcement office.

Building community partnerships can expand the reach of fatherhood efforts far beyond the program doors and into the entire community.

Photo by D. Metzger, Rosemount Center HS



Mediation Services: Seek out relationships with community partners who can help resolve conflict and misunderstanding among family members. The family serves as a child's most valuable resource for achieving success in life. It is vital that resources are available to help build strong family relationships.

Special Needs Services: Seek out community partners who can help those fathers who are struggling with special challenges, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, anger management, sexual addiction, and depression.

When identifying a potential community partner, visit the organization and try to build at least one personal, significant relationship. Be friendly, stay in touch, and offer help to them in return.

Before referring fathers to an agency:

- Know at least one person at the agency on a first-name basis;
- Know the agency's process and how the father will be treated; and
- Be able to call and follow-up with the father and agency on every referral.

Be sure to invite current and potential partners to visit the Head Start program. Help them buy into the father involvement vision.



Staff Awareness: How Well Do Staff Relate to and Interact with Men?

When programs set out to work with fathers, it is important that program staff—both male and female—take a male attitude assessment in order to recognize any underlying experiences or attitudes that might negatively influence their behavior. Sometimes personal experiences with fathers, or other men, can help staff members in their work. At other times, they may create roadblocks that need to be overcome. Below is a tool that helps assess staff attitudes and experiences that may be roadblocks.

Have staff members find some time alone to ask themselves the following questions, taking time to consider each question as honestly as possible. If comfortable, do this activity as a group, sharing and discussing responses.

Questions for Thoughtful Consideration:

Other than your biological father, who were the important men in your life when you were growing up?

As you think about it, were there many men in your life or very few? What was your relationship like with these men?

Sometimes personal experiences with fathers, or other men, can help staff members in their work, and other times they may create roadblocks that need to be overcome.



Photo by D. Metzger, NRC

What did you learn about manhood from these men? What did you learn about manhood from the important women in your life?

What role did your biological father play in your life? How did you feel about him when you were growing up? If your father was active in your life, what kind of father was he?

If your biological father was not active in your life, how did you feel about that? How did his absence affect your feelings about yourself?

Did anyone else play the role of father in your life? If so, what was this man like and how did you feel about him?



As you look back, what impact has your relationship with your father had on your life in general? What impact has it had on your current attitude toward or expectations of men?

What have you learned about yourself in this activity?

How do you think, for good or bad, your early experiences with your father or father figures might influence how you view fathers in Head Start?

Given this, what are some things you might need to work on as you prepare to serve fathers in your program?

Adapted from an assessment created by Pamela Wilson under contract with the Head Start Bureau



Becoming a More Father-Friendly Program

As suggested earlier, a successful father involvement program requires both an assessment of the Head Start program, its staff and parents, and research on what a successful fatherhood program looks like. It also requires connecting the two. Think about what needs to be done. How much of that is being done now? How much of what is currently being done might need to be modified?

What follows is a Father-Friendly Environment Assessment that provides a useful framework for assessing the current environment of the Head Start center and identifying steps to take to improve father friendliness. This is followed by a simple Action Plan for Improvement, a living document that will evolve as progress is made and needs change. Both the self-assessment and the action plan serve as helpful exercises in strengthening the program's foundation to work with fathers effectively and foster their active engagement in the lives of their children.



Father-Friendly Environment Assessment

The Father-Friendly Environment Assessment is designed to help prepare your program to provide services to fathers and support their involvement in the lives of their children.

Completing this form will help to steer your program toward successful father involvement efforts and help establish a firm foundation for building the rest of your fatherhood work.

Directions: Walk through your center and complete the following assessment. If you are a woman, it might be useful to take a man with you.

Scoring:

- 2 points for having achieved this goal
- 1 point for some progress made
- 0 points for no action taken yet

First Impressions _____

The initial reception area is free of signs or posters that would be possibly intimidating for men, e.g., domestic violence posters that target men as batterers. The name of the agency is neutral or inclusive of men. The receptionist is warm, friendly, and comfortable with men and fathers participating in program activities.

Physical Landscape _____

All visual materials include men and fathers of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds in positive roles; posters have positive, non-stereotypical messages. Magazines and brochures are relevant to both men and women. Materials are available in the home languages of the families.

Role Models _____

There are men present in the agency, including male staff working with parents and children in roles other than as van driver, cook, janitor, or accountant.

If you have a newsletter, make sure it has a section about dad's involvement in your program.

Photo by D. Mentzer, NRC

Photo courtesy of HSNRC



Linguistic Landscape

Verbal and nonverbal language and cues avoid stereotyped generalizations about men; there is no joking or humorous conversation where men/fathers are the butt of the joke; there are no informal negative conversations about men to be overheard.

Materials/Activities for Parents

Equipment, resources, and types of parenting activities are diverse and relevant for both fathers and mothers. Specific brochures/publications are provided for fathers, and non-custodial fathers are recognized. Referral lists include services for fathers as well as mothers. Fathers are involved in planning and implementing fatherhood involvement programs and other activities for the agency.

Communications and Roles

Men in the agency, whether staff or fathers, are listened to with open minds; their ideas are considered thoughtfully. Differences in male/female communication styles are understood and respected – men are not expected to communicate exactly like women. Men are appreciated in both traditional and nontraditional roles. They are not asked to do all of the heavy labor tasks (but are appreciated if they volunteer to do these things). Their ability to be effective and appropriate in their interactions with young children is recognized.

Interaction with Parents

Mothers and fathers get equal respect and attention from staff. Fathers are addressed by name in their primary language, if possible. The staff expects fathers to be involved, welcomes them warmly, recognizes and respects differences in male and female parenting styles, and avoids “correcting” fathers as they interact with their children.

Classroom Environment

Father-friendly children's books, including non-fiction, are available. Pictures, posters and other visual materials show fathers at work and at home. Materials are available that fathers might enjoy using with young children. Curriculum topics and learning experiences are chosen that appeal to men. Stereotypic presentations of men in books, posters, toys, or conversation are avoided.



Total Score _____

Rating:

- 0-5 Just beginning
- 6-10 In process
- 11-14 Almost there
- 15-16 Congratulations!

Action Plan for Improvement

Based on the Father-Friendly Environmental assessment, what do you recommend to make your program more welcoming to fathers?

Action Steps	Persons Responsible	Timeframe
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____

Adapted from an environmental audit developed by Pamela Wilson under contract with the Head Start Bureau, 2001

Endnotes

¹ Ronald Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, "The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence," *Review of General Psychology*, (2001) 4:382-405.

² W. Bradford Wilcox, *Good Dads: Religion, Civic Engagement, & Paternal Involvement in Low-Income Communities*, (Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, University of Pennsylvania, 2002), p. 12-13.

Appendix: Fathers Matter!

Involving Fathers in Children's Learning

A Kit for Educators and Other Professionals

This kit was developed for educators and other professionals who are working to increase family involvement in education. It outlines strategies for involving fathers in children's learning at home, at school, and in the community.

The kit includes **speaker notes** and **overheads**, a list of **publications** and **on-line resources** on family involvement, and a video clip and **discussion guide** from the October 28, 1999 broadcast "Fathers Matter!" which was produced by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Though not available on-line, you can order the video from the Department's [ED Pubs On-Line Ordering System](#).

Also included is the Department of Education publication, [A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning](#), a comprehensive discussion of current research on fathers' involvement, strategies for improvement, and model programs that are engaging fathers in their children's education.

These materials are useful to pre-service/in-service training and professional development coordinators and as a "just add water" packet. We encourage each organization to add its own information and examples to the kit and to use any or all of the kit contents as appropriate. The kit itself is meant to be used to kick off a discussion, or a series of discussions, on fathers' involvement in children's learning and family involvement in education.

Fathers Matter! Involving Fathers in Children's Learning: A Kit for Educators and Other Professionals is available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/fathers/index.html>

Talking Points for Overheads

Overhead 1—Cover Slide:

This kit was developed in support of fathers' involvement in children's learning. In October 1999, the nationwide teleconference "Fathers Matter!" was hosted by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It brought national attention to the importance of fathers' involvement in children's learning. Examples of effective practices from across the nation were featured during the broadcast. The program was received by hundreds of downlink sites nationally.

Overhead 2—True or False

1. In two-parent households, if mothers are not involved, their children do not achieve well.

False. Research shows that fathers' involvement is important to children's academic standing at all grade levels. In two-parent families, fathers' involvement, but not mothers' involvement, is associated with an increased likelihood that children in the first through fifth grades get mostly As. Among children in the sixth through 12th grades, after controlling for a variety of resources that parents offer at home, fathers' involvement, but not mothers' involvement, remains a significant influence on the likelihood that children get mostly As. In two-parent families, the involvement of fathers exerts a distinct and independent influence on whether children have ever repeated a grade, get mostly As, enjoy school, and participate in extracurricular activities, even after controlling for mothers' involvement in school. In two-parent families, the proportion of children with highly involved fathers remains fairly constant from elementary school (30%) to middle school (25%) to high school (23%). (See notes for Overhead 8)

Overhead 3—True or False

2. Nonresident fathers involved in their children's schools have little impact on their children's success in school.

False. The involvement of nonresident fathers in their children's schools is particularly important for children in grades 6-12. It reduces the chances that these children will be suspended or expelled from school or repeat a grade. Nonresident fathers' involvement is also associated with a greater likelihood that children in all grades participate in extracurricular activities. There is also evidence that the involvement of nonresident fathers increases the likelihood that children in grades 6 through 12 get mostly As and that they enjoy school. However, of children in contact with their nonresident parents, only 31 percent have fathers who have participated in at least one school activity, and only 9 percent have fathers who are highly involved. (See notes for Overhead 5 for definitions of high and low involvement.)

(Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

Overhead 4—True or False

3. Fathers' involvement is as critical to child development in the early years as it is in the later years.

True. Fathers spend less time with their children as their children grow older, in part because children themselves desire to spend more time with peers. However, just the opposite is needed. The older children get the more important their father's involvement is to their development, especially for sons. Some evidence suggests that children and youth rely upon their fathers to provide factual information. Children also tend to believe that, with respect to family goals, the most important one for fathers is that "everyone learn and do well in school." On the other hand, children are more likely to say that

mothers think it is more important to make “everyone feel special and important.” This suggests mothers’ involvement is beneficial for the social and emotional adjustment of children to school, particularly that of young children, but that fathers’ involvement may be key to academic achievement throughout a child’s schooling.

(Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

RESEARCH

Overhead 5—Family Involvement and Student Achievement

Thirty years of research clearly shows that family involvement in education is a “win/win” for both students and schools. In particular student benefits in education are higher grades, better attendance and homework completion, more positive attitudes toward school, higher graduation rates and higher college enrollment rates. Research also shows that strong family-school-community partnerships make a positive difference in student achievement.

School benefits from family involvement are improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families, and better reputations in the community.

(Henderson & Berla, 1994)

Despite this clear evidence of benefits, efforts to involve families are often weak. Schools and teachers need to develop better ways of working with fathers, as well as with mothers.

(U.S. Department of Education, 1994)

RESEARCH

Overhead 6—Family Involvement and Student Achievement Among Two-Parent Families.

Compared to students in a two-parent family—whether natural or stepparents—whose parents had low involvement in their schooling, students whose parents were highly involved, either together or singly were

- more likely to get mostly As,
- less likely to be suspended or expelled, and
- less likely to have repeated a grade.

High involvement by the father or mother can make a positive difference for children’s learning across grades K - 12.

(Nord, Brimhall & West 1997)

Research shows that 87 percent of students who got mostly As and Bs report that their parents were available to help them with their schoolwork when needed. For students getting worse than C grades, 72 percent said that their parents were available. (Harris 1998)

High involvement means that one or both parents had done three or all four of these activities during the school year: attended a general school meeting, attended a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, attended a school or class event, and served as a volunteer at school. Parents were said to have low involvement in their children's schools if they had done none or only one of the four activities. (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

Overhead 7—Single Fathers' Involvement and Student Achievement

These and other findings to be discussed are based on the overall cross tabulations in the study on fathers' involvement (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997). Controls for other variables sometimes change the strength of these relationships.

Compared to students in single-parent families whose fathers had a low level of involvement, students with highly involved single fathers were

- more likely to get As,
- less likely to be suspended or expelled, and
- less likely to have to repeat a grade.

In single-father families

- 32 percent of children in grades K - 12 whose fathers were highly involved got mostly As, compared to 17 percent for those whose fathers had low involvement.

- 35 percent of children in grades K - 12 whose fathers were not highly involved were suspended or expelled, compared to 11 percent whose fathers were highly involved.

- 18 percent of children in grades K - 12 whose fathers were not highly involved repeated a grade, compared to 13 percent of those whose fathers were highly involved.

- 44 percent of children in grades K - 12 whose fathers were highly involved enjoyed school, compared to 30 percent of those whose fathers were not highly involved.

(Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

RESEARCH

Overhead 8—Non-Resident Fathers' Involvement and Student Achievement

Compared to students neither of whose parents was involved, students whose non-resident father was highly involved in school activities were

More likely to get mostly As,
less likely to be suspended or expelled, and
less likely to have to repeat a grade.

Research shows that, for children with non-resident fathers

35 percent of those in grades K - 12 whose fathers were highly involved got mostly As, compared to 29 percent of those whose fathers were not.

28 percent of those in grades K - 12 whose fathers were not highly involved were suspended or expelled, compared to 14 percent of those whose fathers were.

18 percent of those in grades K - 12 whose fathers were not highly involved repeated a grade, compared to 7 percent of those whose fathers were.

45 percent of those in grades K - 12 whose fathers were highly involved enjoyed school, compared to 35 percent of those whose fathers were not highly involved.

(Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

RESEARCH

Overhead 9—Involvement of Single Fathers in Their Children's Education Across Grade Levels

In general, fathers' involvement in their children's schools decreases as children grow older. Part of the decline may be attributed to a corresponding decline in opportunities at school for parental involvement as children grow older. However, the pattern of decline differs between fathers in two-parent families and those in single-father families. In two-parent families, the proportion of children with highly involved fathers drops from 30 percent to 25 percent between elementary (grades K - 5) and middle school (grades 6 - 8), but then drops only slightly more, to 23 percent, in high school (grades 9 - 12). Among children living in single-father families, there is no decrease in the proportion who have highly involved fathers between elementary and middle schools (53 percent at both grade levels), but a large decrease between middle and high school (to 27 percent).

These results were based on simple tabulations of the data that do not take into account such factors as the parent's education or mother's employment. For example, single fathers are likely to be more educated than fathers in general and this influences involvement.

(Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997)

OPINION

Overhead 10—What People Say About Fathers

According to a 1992 National Center for Fathering Gallup Poll, 96 percent of those surveyed agreed that fathers need to be more involved in their children's education, by, for example, helping with homework or attending parent-teacher conferences. Furthermore, 54 percent agreed that fathers today spend less time with their children than the respondents' fathers did with them. Only 42 percent agree that most fathers know what is going on in their children's lives.

(National Center for Education Statistics, 1997)

OPINION

Overhead 11—What Students Say About Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement

Students say that fathers' and mothers' involvement is key to their success in school. Research shows that highly involved fathers can be as important to children's success as highly involved mothers. Fathers can have a positive impact on their children's academic achievement whether they live in the residence or outside the residence.

(National Center for Education Statistics, 1997)

OPINION

Overhead 12—What Teachers Say About Fathers' and Mothers' Involvement

According to teachers, the "single most important thing public schools need to help students learn" is involved parents. (Henderson & Berla, 1994)

Educators and schools recognize the importance of fathers' involvement. Ways in which schools can involve fathers include:

Providing training for fathers and other men, as well as women, to learn how to tutor students in basic subjects;

Inviting fathers to talk about how their education helped prepare them for their careers; and

Hosting father-child breakfasts or dinners where fathers can meet teachers and school staff.

Overhead 13—Ways to Improve Family Involvement in Education

*** Note to the presenter: Select ideas from each category of this list if time is short.**

Strategies that strengthen family involvement in education must take into account barriers that confront families, schools, and communities.

Barriers include lack of time, not knowing what works, differences in language and culture, unsafe neighborhoods, and schools that do not have a family-friendly environment and are not organized to work with families.

Finding ways to attain the following objectives will help to reduce barriers to family involvement in education. Here are some practices from actual schools as described in the recent *Idea Book* from the U.S. Department of Education.

(Funkhouser and Gonzalez, 1997)

Overcome time and resource constraints.

Find time for teachers

Hire parent coordinators with Title I funds to organize outreach and inform staff of family needs.

Provide resources to support school outreach to families

Use voice mail and information hotlines to make communication more efficient.

Help parents overcome time and resource constraints

Provide early notice, transportation, and child care for parent meetings and send home information to parents who cannot attend.

Provide information and training to parents and school staff.

Provide training to inform and involve parents

Support children's learning at home via parent workshops or home visits.

Organize a family resource center in school

Here, parents can read or borrow books on parenting, meet informally with teachers, attend small workshops, and learn of local jobs, services, and programs.

Provide information and training for school staff

Provide resources on making home visits and positive phone calls, appreciating diversity and family strengths, developing skills for parent-teacher conferences, and helping families become stronger learning environments.

Restructure schools to support family involvement.

Design parent involvement around family needs

Schools can conduct needs assessments through parent surveys, focus groups, town meetings, and neighborhood walks to gather ideas.

Include parents as partners in school-wide restructuring

Invite parents to be on school decision-making committees, site-based management councils, and planning groups.

Make known new uses of school space

Use welcome signs and volunteers to guide entering parents, and make good use of parent centers.

Organize unusual school-family activities

Have parents join teachers on school planning retreats; provide student health and counseling services at school.

Bridge school-family differences.

Reach parents who have little formal education

Call parents about student progress instead of sending written information.

Break the language barrier

Provide bilingual parent liaisons and parent volunteers, and conduct meetings and send materials home in several languages.

Promote cultural understanding

Provide home-school liaisons who understand the background of parents so the school can build on the strengths of other cultures.

Tap external supports for partnerships.

Develop school-community partnerships that marshal added resources

Local businesses, agencies and colleges can help provide family services such as educational programs, social services, health care, and transportation to school events.

Gain district- and state-level support for school-family partnerships

Education agencies can assist with policies, funding, training, and family services. (Funkhouser and Gonzales, 1997)

(U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1997)

Overhead 14 - How Fathers Can Get Involved With Their Children at Home

Helping children learn at home can increase success in school. Fathers can take steps that make a positive difference academically, such as:

Reading with their children—even older children can enjoy this collaborative activity.

Discussing the day's events with their child—it shows interest and builds knowledge.

Working with their child on homework and special projects—this helps children understand the steps involved and gives them encouragement.

Using TV wisely—limiting viewing to no more than two hours a school day gives children more time for reading, doing homework and having conversations with the family.

Establishing a daily routine in the home—setting a time for homework, chores, and other activities helps children be more productive.

Overhead 15— How Schools Can Involve Fathers

Include fathers:

in parent/teacher conferences

in after-school and extracurricular activities

in mentoring and tutoring activities

Schools can keep fathers informed of their children's progress and performance through ongoing contact, including newsletters, conferences, and telephone calls.

Overhead 16—Types of Parent/Family Involvement Practices

How can schools take the lead to promote family involvement in education? One way is to look within the school.

The National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs are based on six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce Epstein. These are:

Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in helping students learn.

Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

School Decision-Making and Advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Collaborating with the Community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Use these PTA Standards to evaluate what your school is doing, and to identify areas you would like to strengthen for working with families and especially for working with fathers.

(National PTA, 1997)

